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Due To Popular Demand, UNH Welcomes Back Former Penobscot Chief March 26

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March 19, 2007

DURHAM, N.H. -- Due to overwhelming interest last fall, the University of New Hampshire welcomes back former Penobscot Chief Barry Dana, who will discuss the struggle by Native Americans to protect their homeland from government and corporate exploitation Monday, March 26, 2007.

The event includes the showing of the award-winning documentary "Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action," which begins at 4:30 p.m. in Theater II of the Memorial Union Building. Dana is one of four Native American activists prominently featured in the film and will speak about 15 minutes prior to the start of the film. A question and answer session will follow the film. The event is free and open to the public.

"We had a huge response to Barry Dana's visit in November. His story and the documentary are compelling, and we had a lively discussion following the film. Unfortunately, the theater filled to capacity quickly and we had to turn people away. We hope that with his return visit, those who did not have the opportunity to attend will join us in March," said Priscilla Reinertsen, who teaches Introduction to Sociology.

The public also is invited to sit in on a classroom discussion with Barry Dana prior to the afternoon events. Dana will speak to two sections of Reinertsen's Introduction to Sociology class. The times are 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. in Horton Room 307.

"Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action" features leaders from four Native American communities passionately engaged in struggles to preserve sovereignty and save their lands from environmental degradation. Dana will discuss confronting the state of Maine and powerful paper companies about dumping toxins in the Penobscot River, the source of his tribe's food and culture for 10,000 years.

Dana grew up on Indian Island on the Penobscot Reservation along the Penobscot River, just 30 miles downstream from a pulp and paper mill. As a child, when Dana swam in the river, he would emerge covered with blisters and rashes. "Spending about half the summer in the water, I'd get these lesions on my legs," Dana says. "So eventually I stopped swimming."

In 1983, Dana graduated from the University of Maine at Orono with a bachelor's degree in education and an associate's degree in forest management. Since then, he has worked to educate people about the traditions of Maine's indigenous nations and help his people regain control of their culture and ancestral lands. Like many others in Maine, Dana had come to believe that the Clean Water Act of 1972 had cleaned up the river that the Penobscot had depended on for centuries. However the people of Maine learned that pulp and paper mills were still dumping toxins in the river, which elicited penalties from the State of Maine.

"Those fines amount to, on a yearly average, \$3,000 -- \$3,000 a year for basically the right to dump billions of gallons of untreated wastewater directly into our river," Dana says.

Today his people are unable to eat the fish, harvest the medicinal plants or swim in the river they hold sacred. Dana continues to fight for a clean Penobscot River. "All over the country, 30 years of environmental protections are quietly being dismantled," he says. "Sometimes it seems like many Americans are blind to what's going on. But we don't have the luxury of looking the other way. We can't give up on the river."

The event is sponsored by the Department of Sociology, and the Dean of Academic and Student Affairs.